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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by American Psychological Association, Anglican Consultative Council, Armenian International Women's Association, Associated Country Women of the World, Baha'i International Community, Catholic International Education Office, Christian Children's Fund, Dominican Leadership Conference, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, Hadassah-Women's Zionist Organization of America, Human Lactation Center, International Alliance of Women, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Psychologists, International Federation of University Women, League of Women Voters of the United States, People's Decade of Human Rights Education, Perhaps Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Simply Help, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Women's Federation for World Peace International, Women's Sports Foundation, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, World ORT Union, Worldwide Organization for Women and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

We, Non-Governmental Organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC, reaffirm and call attention to the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of the girl child. We acknowledge the important step taken in Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) in emphasizing the Girl Child. However, we are concerned that after more than a decade of policies, promises and programs the girl child remains powerless, neglected and invisible.

The fifty-first session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, with the theme "The Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child", offers a unique opportunity for Member States to review progress, improve and accelerate policies and programmes designed to fulfill promises made at Beijing and beyond and to ensure all girls the full enjoyment of their human rights.

The recently released Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children reveals the severe and pervasive nature of the violence endangering the lives of girls on all continents. The root causes of violence, including negative cultural attitudes and practices, poverty and inadequate access to education and health services, create barriers for girls particularly in the form of discrimination, insecurity and disempowerment. These root causes highlight the need for a holistic, rights-based approach to ending discrimination and violence against girls. Of particular note is the need to acknowledge the role of men and boys in ending violence and discrimination against the girl child.

A girl continues to experience many of the worst human rights abuses throughout her life-cycle. She is too often denied her right to life, food, health, education or the freedom to choose her life partner and her life's work. She is repeatedly denied her political, economic, social and cultural rights and subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviors that hinder her development and empowerment. Only a holistic approach grounded in a human rights framework, which considers the undeniable relationships of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural behaviors can effect the true elimination of discrimination and violence against girls. Indeed, this approach was recommended in a substantive assessment of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action via the adoption of General Assembly resolution 60/141 at its sixtieth session.

We are encouraged by the commitments reaffirmed at the 2005 World Summit, where Member States agreed to adopt comprehensive national strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the end of 2015. This agreement takes immediate steps toward saving and improving the lives of millions of people within the span of a few years. However, since gender equality is the essential underpinning for the achievement of all of the MDGs, the failure to call particular attention to the empowerment of the girl child will limit progress on all of the millennium goals and targets. Forging a link between women and girls in interpreting and monitoring all the MDGs and especially Goal 3 on women's empowerment, can be a strategy ensuring progress in eliminating discrimination and violence against the girl child and for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals.

The international legal architecture for girls, mainly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), mutually reinforce the principals of gender equality. These mechanisms should be used to end the invisibility of the girl child by adopting reporting procedures that require State Parties to evaluate their existing laws and policies relating to the girl child and bring them in compliance with these international standards. Adequate resources for the implementation and enforcement of these laws will aid their effectiveness.

Better qualitative and quantitative research will help us all understand the realities of girls and how to reach them. We urge countries, international organizations and universities to conduct research about girls at risk of discrimination and violence. Further, data disaggregated by sex and age related to children in critical sectors inter alia health, education, labor and protection will assist in creating a gender perspective for the planning, implementation and monitoring of government programs.

The skills, ideas and energy of all girls are vital for the full attainment of the goals of gender equality, education, sustainable development and peace. Therefore, we urge Member States, international organizations, national and local governments to ensure that girls have the opportunity to be heard and that their views are valued and incorporated into discussions and decisions, especially into those areas which affect their lives most directly. Participatory mechanisms must be created to enable girls to speak out about the realities of their lives and to share their thoughts and experiences with government and civic leaders who make policy and plan programs. Active engagement fosters, respect and understanding and contributes to the process of empowerment and equality.

The participation of girls must become common practice if policies for social and economic development are to be truly sustainable.